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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by the NGO Committee on UNICEF and Christian Children's Fund, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that 218 million children worldwide between age 5 and 17 engage in some form of child labor. Of these children, an estimated 126 million engage in illegal, hazardous, or exploitative child labor.

The risk of child labor is not always equally distributed — often it is the poorest, most marginalized children, such as girls, who are at greatest risk of engaging in dangerous labor as a means of survival.

While both boys and girls engage in exploitative and hazardous work in order to supplement their family's income, girls are often "expected to sacrifice their education so that they may work to pay for a male sibling to attend school."

> "We work so that the boys can go to school." - Adolescent girl, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone [i]

The vast majority of working girls perform jobs that are hidden, unvalued, and uncounted. Girls' domestic work is the most invisible of all sectors in which girls work[ii] and is often excluded from regulation in a large proportion of countries.[iii] Hidden away, child domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation, and physical and sexual abuse. It is impossible to know the exact number of children engaged in domestic work; however, the ILO estimates that more girls under the age of 16 are in domestic service than in any other category of work.[iv]

The "invisible" nature of this work causes this vast and painful situation to remain unaddressed. These girls are restricted in mobility, confined largely to the domestic sphere, frequently work hours that are twice as long as boys, and comprise the majority of the "very young" workers of the world. Many girls involved in domestic service earn no wages but merely work for a very meager keep. Even if employers would permit girls to attend school, schools would need to be structured to accommodate their work schedules.

Child domestic workers as young as five years old often work 12-18 hours per day to supplement their families' income.[v] The long hours and working conditions deprive them of their childhood and exclude them from society, preventing access to school and health services. These situations have a deleterious effect on their growth, development and health and seriously affect the ability of the child to pursue an education.

Given the poverty faced by millions of families around the world, girls in particular often have no choice but to share in familial responsibilities; and children, well aware of the poverty in which they live, sometimes express fulfillment from their work, as it allows them to contribute to their family's survival.[vi] Girls often perform valuable child rearing and home maintenance tasks and free parents for more remunerative work. Other girls, however, perform excessive non-remunerated household or farm chores for their own families, which can deprive them of appropriate education.[vii]

> "My sister got married and I had to take over her household work, so I had to leave school. My father told me, 'Now that your sister is married, how can you go to school? Graze the cattle during daytime and at night you can study at home." – Adolescent girl, Oruro, Bolivia[viii]

Some girls assist their families in home-based work for wages, such as embroidering, basket making, or gem polishing. Some may also produce goods for market which add to the family income; however, this may in turn depress wages paid, even to adults, for such work.

Girls also comprise many of the approximately 8 million children worldwide engaged in the worst forms of child labor.[ix] According to the International Labor Organization Convention No. 182, the worst forms of child labor include: trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced labor, including the forced recruitment of children in armed conflict;[x] child prostitution and child pornography; the use of children in illicit activities; and any form of work that can harm the health, safety, or morals of children.[xi]

An estimated 1.2 million children under the age of 18 are trafficked throughout the world. Young girls are largely trafficked to work in the commercial sex industry and domestic servitude.[xii] Children - including girls - that are engaged in armed forces and armed groups are often forced to work as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks, or sexual slaves.

Reducing the incidence of child labor around the world, especially girls' labor, requires much more than simply removing children from hazardous or exploitative work. Ending child labor entails long-term community-based development and strengthening child protection policies and mechanisms at the family, community, and societal levels. Parents must have access to decent work or alternative income generation schemes so that they no longer depend on their children's income for survival and children must be provided with access to quality education.

> "Three studies published in 2004 confirmed the positive links between mothers' and fathers' decent work opportunities and girls' education. Income-generating activities for women and the provision of school stipends were also seen to have a positive effect on girls' education. Moreover, mothers' educational levels were found to have a significant impact on children's wellbeing: not only did mothers' higher attainment both reduce the likelihood of children working and increase girls' enrolment, but it also had positive health benefits for children – all the more reason to invest in girls' education."[xiii]

Education is vital to poverty eradication and to the elimination of child labor, including girls' labor. While progress has been made over the past decade in getting more children into school, the pace remains far too slow. Furthermore, the poor quality of some education, resulting from irrelevant and obsolete curricula, overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers and gender discrimination, cause high dropout and repetition rates—especially among girls.[xiv]

> "There are many interventions that can facilitate girls' attendance, such as separate water and sanitation facilities, curriculum development and greater recruitment of female teachers."[xv]

Furthermore, in order to reduce child labor, including work carried out by girls, policy formulation and the adoption of child labor plans must pay attention to the most vulnerable children, particularly to the special situation of girls. "Giving adequate consideration to the special position of these groups is a critical factor for success in fighting child labor, particularly its worst forms."[xvi]

In order to truly reduce the incidence of girls' labor, there exists the need to identify, examine, and expose the common myths or "excuses" that prevent the international community from moving forward to ensure justice and equality for girls, particularly in the area of economic exploitation.

Recommendations

- The community-at-large, women, and especially girls should be consulted in the development of programs and approaches aimed at combating girls' labor.
- Efforts must be made to research and document, raise awareness, and remove the invisibility surrounding the hidden work of girls and traditional thinking that undervalues it and fails to recognize the danger to the girl-worker.
- The amount and type of all forms of home-based work – paid or unpaid - should be recorded and regulated.
- Advocacy on girl-friendly policies that discourage girls' participation in exploitative labor.
- Governments must provide families with viable economic alternatives, such as alternative income-generating opportunities or vocational and skills training, that will make it possible for girls to be given their right to self-development and education, as well as reduce parents' dependence on the income of their daughters for survival.
- National labor law must be enforced, especially adherence to ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor and ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment.
- Mechanisms must be strengthened at multiple levels for monitoring, reporting, and addressing not only exploitative labor practices, but also the forms of abuse and exploitation that lead children into dangerous labor situations.
- All girls should have access to quality education, including early childhood development programs, primary school, secondary school and vocational programs.
- Schools should be made girl-friendly, in order to ensure that girls have a safe and productive learning environment. This could include ensuring separate water and sanitation facilities, girl-focused curriculum development and greater recruitment of female teachers.
- National education policies and education systems must be strengthened in order to prevent girls from engaging in exploitative and hazardous labor and that are more responsive to the needs of girls who leave hazardous work.[xvii]

[i] Christian Children's Fund, Children and Poverty, Voices of Children: Experiences and Perceptions from Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. 2003. 34.

[ii] Basic education and gender equality: Child labour and exploitation; http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_focus_exploitation.html

[iii] ILO-IPEC, The end of child labour: Within reach, Geneva: International Labor Office, 2006. 24

[iv] ILO-IPEC, Subject Area: Child Domestic Labour; http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/themes/domestic/index.htm; April 2005.

[v] Child Domestic Workers, Part 2: Child Labour in the Domestic Sector; http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/child/download/part2.pdf; 30

[vi] Christian Children's Fund, Children and Poverty, Voices of Children: Experiences and Perceptions from Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. 2003. 24

[vii] ILO-IPEC, The end of child labour: Within reach, Geneva: International Labor Office, 2006. 56

[viii] Christian Children's Fund, Understanding Children's Experience of Poverty: An Introduction to the DEV Framework, 2005. 17.

[ix] ILO-IPEC, Every Child Counts: New Global Estimates on Child Labor, Geneva: International Labor Office, April, 2002.

[x] International law increasingly holds that any child recruitment, forced or non-forced, is a heinous rights violation and a war crime.

[xi] ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

[xii] ILO-IPEC, Every Child Counts: New Global Estimates on Child Labor, Geneva: International Labor Office, April, 2002.

[xiii] ILO-IPEC, The end of child labour: Within reach. Geneva: International Labor Office, 2006. 32-33

[xiv] UNESCO, http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/

[xv] ILO-IPEC, The end of child labour: Within reach, Geneva: International Labor Office, 2006. 59

[xvi] Ibid. 18

[xvii] ILO-IPEC, Education in the Work of ILO-IPEC, September 2005. http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/themes/education/edu.htm